

The Enlightenment Bible in Antebellum America (1812–1831): Archibald Alexander’s Appraisal

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Abstract

This essay addresses the pioneering biblical scholarship of Archibald Alexander (1772–1851), the founding father of Princeton Theological Seminary, in the contexts of biblical criticism and the academic Bible that were being discussed and created at German universities. Alexander was among the first nineteenth-century American Presbyterian professors to interact with innovative research emerging from Europe, especially the work of Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791). He is worthy of research attention for establishing a central position for Princeton Theological Seminary in the field of biblical studies, as well as for interacting with the creators of the Enlightenment Bible while defending Calvinist theology and epistemology.

In his description of modern biblical criticism and the “academic Bible,” Michael Legaspi discusses the ways that German universities in general and Johann Michaelis in particular re-created the Bible.¹ The enthusiasm that made the Protestant Reformation such a prolific period of biblical translation in Germany “still drove the early eighteenth-century invention” of critical scholarship—what one modern historian has called “the Enlightenment Bible.”² As innovative German critical scientific scholarship spread throughout Europe, and eventually crossed the Atlantic to America, the best theological minds in New England and Princeton became engaged with biblical criticism.³ However, scholars disagree on precisely when North American academics engaged with the work of their European counterparts.⁴ During the early nineteenth century, a small number of Princeton

For providing access to manuscript collections, I am grateful to the archivist Kenneth Henke of the Archives at Princeton Theological Seminary.

¹ Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5, 169.

² For a solid account of the modern history of European biblical scholarship, see Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 57.

³ Jerry W. Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 8.

⁴ In his essay, “The Higher Criticism Comes to America,” Ira Brown argues that discussions regarding historical criticism “did not begin until after 1880.” Ira V. Brown, “The Higher Criticism Comes to America, 1880–1900,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 38.4 (December 1960): 193–212. Jerry Brown associates the product of American biblical criticism in New England with American graduate students studying in Germany. Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America*, 8. Michael Lee’s *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty* argues that scholars were already examining the Bible critically in eighteenth-century America. Michael J. Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty: Battles over Authority and Interpretation in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4. In his excellent recent account on Jonathan Edwards, Douglas Sweeney notes that Edwards was familiar with early Bible critics such as Richard Simon and Jean LeClerc. Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 19. Cf. Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). Other recent historical research suggests that German critical scholarship had been considered and debated in the early decades of nineteenth-century America. Americans were introduced to German biblical scholarship via Unitarianism during that period, with the Unitarian pastor and scholar Joseph Stevens Buckminster, who was influenced by Johann Michaelis and introduced other German critical scholars and their works, including Johann Jakob Griesbach’s edition of the New Testament, to America. James Turner and Michael Lee assert that Griesbach’s publication of the American edition was a significant juncture—“a turning point in American church history in general and at Princeton in particular.” James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 216; Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty*, 108, 111, 124, 130. See also James P. Byrd, “The ‘New World’ of North America and Canada and the Globalization of Critical Biblical Scholarship,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø et al., vol. 3.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 171–202; Richard A. Grusin, *Transcendentalist Hermeneutics*:

faculty members gave the first American responses to the new movement known as *neology*, which was associated with the Enlightenment Bible.⁵

Historiographical research on engagement with Bible criticism in the early decades of nineteenth-century America merits greater attention. Of particular interest in this essay is the early engagement of Archibald Alexander (1772–1851) with new trends in biblical criticism emerging from German universities. As inaugural lectures are important sources of academic genres, I will use the text of Alexander’s inaugural lecture to explain his engagement with biblical scholarship and enthusiastic interactions with his European peers.⁶ Though practically forgotten today, in his 1812 inaugural lecture at Princeton he expressed what he believed were the key tenets of biblical scholarship and the essential epistemological aspects of the Enlightenment Bible and rational theology. I will use this lecture, unpublished texts of class lectures, and *The Canon of the Old and New Testament* (1826) to explain Alexander’s biblical scholarship and his interactions with critical scholarship while defending Calvinism.⁷ As a conservative scholar, Alexander was interested in applying current discoveries and academic tools to arrive at a precise understanding of the Bible. My analysis of Alexander avoids what Robert Moore-Jumonville has called “the bipolar paradigm” of religious interpretation by modern scholars that attempts to place nineteenth-century biblical scholars into either “anti-critic” or “liberal” camps.⁸ I will show that, unlike others, Alexander was ready to interact with modern biblical criticism.

Institutional Authority and the Higher Criticism of the Bible (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 62. For research on later biblical criticism in America, see Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (Vancouver, BC: Regent, 2004).

⁵ For studies on the early interactions of Princeton professors with historical biblical criticism, see John William Stewart, “The Tethered Theology: Biblical Criticism, Common Sense Philosophy, and the Princeton Theologians, 1812–1860” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990), 82; see also Marion Ann Taylor, *The Old Testament in the Old Princeton School (1812–1929)* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 1–87; Annette G. Aubert, “Nineteenth-Century Princeton Theology and European Scholarship,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Carl R. Trueman (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2017).

⁶ Archibald Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse, Delivered in the Church at Princeton, New Jersey, in the Presence of the Directors of the Theological Seminary, on the 12th of August 1812,” in *The Sermon Delivered at the Inauguration of the Rev. Archibald Alexander, P. P., As Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology: In the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, and Philip Milledoler (New York: Whiting & Watson, 1812).

⁷ Archibald Alexander, *The Canon of the Old and New Testaments Ascertained: Or, the Bible Complete, Without the Apocrypha & Unwritten Traditions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 1826).

⁸ Robert Moore-Jumonville, *The Hermeneutics of Historical Distance: Mapping the Terrain of American Biblical Criticism, 1880–1914* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), xxii, xxv, 2. Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 1:20–21.

I. *Developments at German Universities: The Enlightenment Bible*

Understanding early nineteenth-century biblical scholarship in North America requires familiarity with developments occurring in eighteenth-century German universities. When Alexander started teaching at Princeton, American biblical studies were at an elementary stage, with no American scholars having spent time at German universities where biblical scholarship prospered outside of church control.⁹ German scholars in various fields were under the influence of Immanuel Kant’s “philosophical distinction between the real and phenomenal worlds” and were interested in comprehending the real world by means of detailed empirical studies and rational investigations of “observed phenomena.”¹⁰ Scholars working at the Prussian universities of Halle and Berlin acknowledged “the rational philosophy” of that period and supported the continuation of critical and rational “German philosophical scholarship.”¹¹

The University of Halle, where leading Princeton professors studied, was at one time considered the focal point of “evangelical piety.” Leading German rationalist scholars, such as Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791) and Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791), received pietistic educations at Halle, but as their outlooks underwent fundamental changes, and as key foundational ideas of the Christian faith were challenged,¹² Halle faculty gradually unlocked the doors to rationalism,¹³ thereby in turn opening the door for the formation of an Enlightenment Bible and the emergence of a neologist harmonization of biblical “revelation and reason.”¹⁴ In the 1760s and 1770s, Semler and Michaelis, the founding fathers of German biblical criticism, directed “the Neologist reformation of theology and hermeneutics.”¹⁵ Some biblical scholars of the neologist school were involved in

⁹ Lefferts A. Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983), 214. From 1815 on, Edward Everett, George Ticknor, George Bancroft, and Joseph Green Cogswell were among the first Americans to study in Germany. Jurgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship: A Study in the Transfer of Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 3–4. See also Henry Geitz, Jürgen Heideking, and Jurgen Herbst, eds., *German Influences on Education in the United States to 1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), 202.

¹⁰ Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America*, 38.

¹¹ Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship*, 54.

¹² “Historical Notices of Berlin,” *Christian’s Penny Magazine* 223 (September 10, 1836): 291.

¹³ Ted Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 166.

¹⁴ Mogens Müller, “Kierkegaard and Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Biblical Scholarship: A Case of Incongruity,” in *Kierkegaard and the Bible: The New Testament*, ed. Lee C. Barrett and Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 286.

¹⁵ Peter H. Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 171.

“detheologiz[ing]” the Protestant Bible, discarding “the *textus receptus*,” and creating an “Enlightenment Bible.”¹⁶

Semler, considered the father of neology, rejected a “supernatural understanding” of the Bible and instead called for “a biblical interpretation” without theological “presupposition.”¹⁷ He emphasized the idea of “Enlightenment optimism” by describing Christianity as an “ongoing revelation,” and he advocated a purely scientific explanation of the Bible.¹⁸ He is considered a “pioneer of modern biblical science” who secured “the independence of exegesis.”¹⁹ Semler, who championed a scientific explanation of the Bible, proposed a strictly “historical exegesis of the text.” According to his historical method and influences, differences between theology and dogma were considered incompatible, thus preparing the way for Johann Gabler’s distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology.²⁰

Alexander on Critical Biblical Scholarship

As a professor of didactic and polemic theology, Archibald Alexander was trained in seventeenth-century Reformed theology and Scottish philosophy under his Virginia preceptor, William Graham.²¹ At Princeton Seminary he was the first to engage in arguments regarding “radical biblical criticism” while pushing for “biblical studies” to be given a principal position in the seminary’s core curriculum.²² Before being offered a position at Princeton, Alexander had read books on

every thing connected with the criticism and interpretation of the sacred text ... taking Hebrew lessons of a learned Jew, perusing the Septuagint, collating other versions, and pushing more deeply those researches which he had long before commenced, into the original of the New Testament.²³

¹⁶ Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 30, 96.

¹⁷ David R. Law, *The Historical-Critical Method: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2012), 43.

¹⁸ Müller, “Kierkegaard and Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Biblical Scholarship,” 286.

¹⁹ Roy A. Harrisville, *Pandora’s Box Opened: An Examination and Defense of Historical-Critical Method and Its Master Practitioners* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 111.

²⁰ Jan Jacob van Oosterzee, *Christian Dogmatics*, trans. John W. Watson and M. J. Evans (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1874), 44. Joachim Schaper, “The Question of a ‘Biblical Theology’ and the Growing Tension between ‘Biblical Theology’ and a ‘History of the Religion of Israel’: from Johann Philipp Gabler to Rudolf Smend, Sen.,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, ed. Magne Sæbø et al., vol. 3.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 635.

²¹ For biographical information on Alexander’s life, see John A. Mackay, “Archibald Alexander (1772–1851),” in *Sons of the Prophets: Leaders in Protestantism from Princeton Seminary*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 3–21.

²² Marion Ann Taylor, “Can These Dry Bones Live?” *Theology Today* 69.3 (2012): 261, 263.

²³ James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander, D.D.: First Professor in the Theological*

According to his biographer, Alexander was well acquainted with the Greek New Testament, and had routinely been reading “a beautiful Glasgow edition of Griesbach” that was usually “in his hands during all the private hours” of Sunday.²⁴ Thus, Alexander was familiar with Griesbach’s notion of “critical study,” which reflected Semler’s “critical empiricism” as well as John Mill’s and Johann Jakob Wettstein’s “text-critical material for the New Testament.”²⁵

Arguably one of the most significant texts that Alexander purchased was the “Michaelis Edition of Halle” (1720), a critical edition of the Old Testament that he claimed to read daily for almost “half a century.”²⁶ Alexander’s list of revered texts explains his profound preoccupation with “Criticism and Hermeneutics” that he shared with his Princeton colleagues and students, along with his interests in biblical languages, hermeneutical methods, and archaeology.²⁷ Alexander went out of his way to familiarize his students with background information on contemporary conflicts between critical research and traditional biblical interpretations,²⁸ though basing his own responses on traditional approaches.²⁹

Unlike Charles Hodge (1797–1878), Alexander never visited Europe, yet there is evidence to indicate that he nevertheless was very interested in European critical developments. The outline of his 1818–19 course on “Biblical Criticism” includes lectures based on the work of German scholar Georg Lorenz Bauer (1755–1806), who taught at the Universities of Altdorf and Heidelberg—evidence of Alexander’s early familiarity with German biblical criticism.³⁰ In his lectures, Alexander defined biblical criticism as “signify[ing] any application of learning” to the Bible, “whether the object be to determine the true reading or the true sense of any particular

Seminary, at Princeton, New Jersey (New York: Scribner, 1870), 279.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁵ Bernard Orchard and Thomas R. W. Longstaff, *J. J. Griesbach: Synoptic and Text-Critical Studies, 1776–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68. For a helpful discussion on Johann Jakob Griesbach, see Werner G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, trans. S. McLean Gilmour and Howard C. Kee (New York: Abingdon, 1973), 74.

²⁶ Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 319.

²⁷ Alexander’s personal library was filled with various folios. He restricted the temptation to limit his collection to theological texts, while focusing mostly on biblical and exegetical studies. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 320, 350.

²⁸ Archibald Alexander, “Biblical Criticism, No. 1, Old Testament,” (Princeton, n.d.) Manuscript 21.18, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library; Archibald Alexander, “Biblical Criticism of the New Testament, No. 1,” (Princeton, n.d.) Manuscript 23.4, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

²⁹ Taylor, “Can These Dry Bones Live?” 263.

³⁰ Loetscher, *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism*, 221.

passage.”³¹ Due to his concern about grammatical and philological aspects of textual interpretation, Alexander had to engage with the work of critical scholars. He introduced his students to the works of Richard Simon (1638–1712), Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), and Michaelis, among others.³² In his lectures he especially praised Eichhorn’s work on Old Testament codices, declaring that “he deserves to be ranked among those Hebrew Critics and Philologists who hold the very first place.”³³ He conveyed to his students that “Eichhorn has cultivated this department of theological Literature more assiduously than any other man.”³⁴ Similarly, he gave special praise to the German philologist and orientalist and Göttingen professor Michaelis for his contributions to the Enlightenment Bible. For Alexander, Michaelis was “one of the greatest Biblical critics By him the impulse was given to this sphere of literature in Germany.”³⁵

A key Michaelis project was his reply to Semler’s questions regarding “canonicity” and studying the “authenticity” of New Testament books through “historical research.”³⁶ Alexander joined the discussion with his own book, *The Canon of the Old and New Testament*, in which he vehemently disagreed with Michaelis’s position that the inspiration of New Testament books rests entirely on “proof of the inspiration made by Christ to his apostles.”³⁷ Michaelis argued that only New Testament books written by the apostles could be viewed as inspired. Alexander faulted Michaelis for not appealing to the witness of both the “Universal Church” and “the apostles,” which he felt provided stronger testimony to scriptural inspiration

³¹ Charles Hodge, “Lectures Notes of Archibald Alexander on Biblical Criticism,” (Princeton, December 31, 1817) Manuscript 12.2, The Charles Hodge Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

³² Archibald Alexander, “Biblical Criticism No. 7,” (Princeton, n.d.) Manuscript 23.3, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

³³ Hodge, “Lecture Notes of Archibald Alexander on Biblical Criticism.” Cf. Stewart, “The Tethered Theology,” 108.

³⁴ Hodge, “Lecture Notes of Archibald Alexander on Biblical Criticism.”

³⁵ *Ibid.* Alexander relied heavily on English translations of German texts for his research, especially the translations of Herbert Marsh (1757–1839), the Lady Margaret Professor of Cambridge and Bishop of Llandaff, who had studied with Griesbach and Michaelis in Leipzig and Göttingen. Marsh was responsible for translating Michaelis’s *Introduction to the New Testament*, with commentary. See Johann D. Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Herbert Marsh, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1793–1801).

³⁶ William Baird, *From Deism to Tübingen*, vol. 1 of *History of New Testament Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1972), 131.

³⁷ Archibald Alexander, *The Canon of the Old and New Testaments Ascertained: Or, the Bible Complete, Without the Apocrypha & Unwritten Traditions* (London: John Miller, 1831), 198.

than “the promise made by Christ to his apostles.”³⁸ When arguing that Scripture was written under “the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” Alexander made clear his disagreement with Michaelis’s proposition that the Gospels were simply “human productions, and by degrees came to be considered as inspired writings.”³⁹ Alexander especially disapproved of Michaelis’s questioning of “the genuineness of some of the books, as well as the inspiration of some of the writers.”⁴⁰ This is one of the examples of Alexander expressing respect for German scholarship while challenging modern biblical criticism that questioned orthodoxy and inspiration.

II. Alexander’s 1812 Inaugural Address and His Ideas on the Biblical Canon

Alexander’s own theological scholarship was based on a Calvinistic presupposition of faith and biblical authority, ideas that he clearly expressed in his inaugural address. Similar to current traditions at some British universities, the function of inaugural addresses in the nineteenth century was to provide platforms for new professors or administrators to describe their work and guiding principles.⁴¹ Alexander’s inaugural address had a particularly interesting context: it was given the year when, according to Brooks Holifield, “Modern American critical scholarship had its symbolic birth.”⁴² Alexander gave his address at the official opening of Princeton Seminary in August 1812. The topics of biblical hermeneutics and biblical canon that he covered in the talk, entitled “Search the Scriptures,” he later expanded into a book-length treatise on biblical canonicity.⁴³ Mark Noll has argued that this lecture merits “careful attention” because it can be viewed as central to “the inauguration of Princeton Theology.”⁴⁴ In his lecture, Alexander criticized not only

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 199. Alexander cited Michaelis’s acknowledgment: “I must confess that I am unable to find a satisfactory proof of their inspiration, and the more I investigate the subject, and the oftener I compare their writings with those of St. Matthew and St. John, the greater are my doubts.” Ibid., 194. Johann D. Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Herbert Marsh, 3rd ed. (London: Rivington, 1819), 1:87.

⁴⁰ Alexander, *The Canon*, 246.

⁴¹ Natalia Kovalyova, “Presidential Inaugural Addresses,” in *Opening Windows on Texts and Discourses of the Past*, ed. Janne Skaffari (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2005), 41.

⁴² E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 191.

⁴³ Alexander, *The Canon of the Old and New Testaments Ascertained*.

⁴⁴ Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology, 1812–1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (1983; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 72.

the Catholic Church and deistic thinkers, but also rationalistic theologians, Socinians, and mystics.⁴⁵ His emphases on divine revelation, inspiration, doctrine, and piety would become central themes in the work of Princeton faculty members, along with their employment of Baconianism and emphasis on scientific religion. In his lecture he championed traditional Calvinism and the application of rigorous scholarship to theological efforts, both of which characterized the work of early and later nineteenth-century Princeton faculty members.⁴⁶

In the months and years following his lecture, Alexander emphasized biblical authenticity and inspiration when responding to the critical scholarship that was emerging from Germany. To this end he addressed questions tied to the biblical canon, specifically its traditional formation of the canon. An important text on the canon during this period was Johann Semler's *Treatise on the Free Examination of the Canon* (1771–75), in which he argued that traditionally held notions on “the building of the Canon” were misguided.⁴⁷ Semler insisted that the canon must be viewed as “human literature” that was not “divine, but human” (*nicht götlich, aber menschlich*).⁴⁸ Alexander quickly responded with his belief that the books in the Old and New Testament “contain the truths of God” and “ascertain what these truths are.”⁴⁹ He never wavered in his support of the traditional Protestant doctrine of inspiration,⁵⁰ insisting “that the canon of the Old Testament has undergone no change since the introduction of Christianity.”⁵¹ When responding to new ideas about the formation of the canon, Alexander relied on historical evidence from sources such as the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, the early church fathers, and the general councils to support his position that “the books of the New Testament were received by the ancient church, in all its parts.”⁵²

⁴⁵ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 74–76, 78–79.

⁴⁶ Annette G. Aubert, “J. Gresham Machen and the Theology of Crisis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64.2 (2002): 337–38.

⁴⁷ Henry S. Nash, *The History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament: Being the History of the Process Whereby the Word of God Has Won the Right to Be Understood* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), 103, 106.

⁴⁸ Johann Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canon: Nebst Beantwortung einiger Recensionen des ersten Theils* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1772), 2:491.

⁴⁹ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 62; *The Canon* (1826), 248.

⁵⁰ For a discussion on Johann Semler and the Canon, see Bernhard Weiss, *Lehrbuch der Biblischen Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin: Hertz, 1873), 18. See also Gottfried Hornig, “Hermeneutik und die Bibelkritik bei Johann Salomon Semler,” in *Historische Kritik und Biblischer Kanon in der deutschen Aufklärung*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow, Walter Sparr, and John Woodbridge (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1988), 219–36.

⁵¹ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 63.

⁵² His argument was later adopted by B. B. Warfield, who was critical of the idea regarding

As regards criteria for canonicity, Alexander held fast to the traditional argument “that the Bible is the word of God, and an authoritative rule”⁵³—a direct challenge to Semler’s suggestions that “the Word of God and Holy Scripture are not identical” and that not all Scripture is authoritative, as well as his question regarding whether the reason why any “book belongs to the Canon” is entirely “historical.”⁵⁴ However, Alexander did acknowledge that the canon deserved investigation regarding the question, “What belongs [in] the Bible?”⁵⁵ Reflecting his concerns on method, Alexander used a historical approach that accepted the “testimony of history” when responding to the question, “How to decide the canonical books?” In this regard, Alexander was clearly in agreement with the French bishop and Renaissance scholar Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721), who also used a historical argument when writing about the canon. Alexander was familiar with Huet’s *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679),⁵⁶ an apologetic text that defended the certainty of Christianity according to beliefs based on “the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.”⁵⁷ Huet argued that ancient heritage and internal “illumination” represented the gist of religion. Similar to Huet, Alexander believed that new ideas and arguments required support in the form of ancient testimony in order “to carry conviction.”⁵⁸ Alexander cited Huet when asserting “that all those books should be deemed Canonical and inspired, which were received as such, by those who lived nearest to the time when they were published.”⁵⁹ To refute Michaelis’s ideas that the books “were useful human productions,” Alexander noted “the universal reception of these books by the whole primitive church” when arguing “that they were not mere human productions, but composed by divine inspiration.”⁶⁰ In his book on the

“gradual formation of the canon.” B. B. Warfield, “Recent Theological Literature,” *Presbyterian Review* 9 (1888): 677. Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 65.

⁵³ Alexander, *The Canon* (1831), 3.

⁵⁴ Kümmel, *The New Testament*, 63.

⁵⁵ Alexander, *The Canon* (1831), 3. Alexander taught his students that “biblical criticism includes whatever may be necessary to the setting of the canonical authority of the books of the Sacred Scriptures.” Archibald Alexander, “Compendium of Lectures: Biblical and Jewish Antiquities and Oriental Customs, Number 1 undated,” Manuscript 21.16, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library.

⁵⁶ Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Petri Danielis Huetii Demonstratio Evangelica ad Serenissimum Delphinum* (Parisiis: Apud Stephanum Michallet, 1679).

⁵⁷ Henning Reventlow, *From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, vol. 4 of *History of Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 114.

⁵⁸ Susanna Åkerman, “The Forms of Queen Cristina’s Academies,” in *The Shapes of Knowledge from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Donald R. Kelley and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1991), 166.

⁵⁹ Alexander, *The Canon* (1826), 206.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

canon, Alexander gives countless examples of his willingness to apply the testimony of history in response to new assertions being made by critical biblical scholars such as Michaelis. However, current scholarship describes Alexander's approach as flawed and primarily serving popular interests.⁶¹

Biblical Authenticity and Criticism

After emphasizing "the perfection of the canon" in his inaugural lecture, Alexander had to address issues about the truthfulness or integrity of biblical texts.⁶² Although he challenged the presuppositions that underlay the historical-critical method, he partly agreed with its agenda in terms of investigating and testing the authenticity of biblical books without rejecting their biblical authority.⁶³ He believed that making this distinction was essential to proving that the Bible, during its transmission, did not undergo what he called "material injury," either by purposeful deception or scribal mistakes.⁶⁴ Alexander was aware of the belief among some eighteenth-century scholars that the Bible had been significantly corrupted, and he acknowledged that such a view "led to a more extensive and accurate examination and collation of the manuscript *codices* than had been [done] before ... g[iving] rise to that species of Biblical criticism."⁶⁵ Eichhorn, one of the creators of the rationalistic methods of hermeneutics and whose work Alexander discussed in class lectures, believed that all Old Testament stories were corrupted myths. Armed with new critical research, Eichhorn concluded that "all recitals of divine interpositions in the Mosaic history must be reduced to natural events, which were reported in legends that afterwards became disfigured."⁶⁶ While Alexander acknowledged and respected new biblical scholarship, he resisted many of their critical readings, claims of verification, and findings. He especially resisted the historical-critical method's refutation of "divine causation either of the biblical history or the biblical writings."⁶⁷

In light of Alexander's interaction with critical scholarship, it is important to consider recent scholarship that challenges the notion of a "bipolar paradigm ... [that forces] American biblical criticism into a dualistic mold," in which progressive theologians favor new "historicist patterns" that

⁶¹ Taylor, *The Old Testament*, 26.

⁶² Alexander, "An Inaugural Discourse," 65.

⁶³ Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (London: Yale University Press, 1980), 18.

⁶⁴ Alexander, "An Inaugural Discourse," 66.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ John Blackburn, "A Course of Systematic Theology.—Theological Institutes," in *The Popular Biblical Educator: Devoted to the Literature, Interpretation, And Right Use of the Holy Scriptures* (London: Cassell, 1854), 277.

⁶⁷ Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 18.

conservatives are likely to reject.⁶⁸ Alexander appears to be a good example of someone taking a middle path, speaking positively at times about new trends in critical scholarship while still considering the ancient church fathers as authoritative voices. Even though it is true that a significant portion of nineteenth-century American ministers generally rejected biblical criticism, most traditional scholars gave criticism its due in their interpretive work.⁶⁹ However, for the most part American Protestant professors carefully selected only a few features of critical scholarship, and as Elizabeth Clark has observed, they energetically resisted ideas “they found offensive to the evangelical sympathies.”⁷⁰

It is therefore easy to recognize that in terms of cutting-edge scholarship, tensions were bound to emerge between critical historical awareness and church tradition, with strong tensions surfacing when Alexander attempted to defend traditional views while adopting certain “tools of human learning” used in new scholarship.⁷¹ One example is his praise of the Near Eastern trips made by German scholars (including Michaelis’s voyages and discoveries), and his comment that remote “countries were visited, the dark cells of cloisters and monasteries explored, and all important libraries ransacked, in search of the copies of the scriptures.”⁷² For Alexander, such explorations of oriental research provided a model to be imitated, and he praised those who, as “learned men, with unparalleled diligence, employed their whole lives in the collation of manuscripts, and in noting every, even the smallest variation, in their *readings*.”⁷³ Although he described such endeavors as being useful “to the cause of truth,” Alexander was swift to voice his reservations about critical processes that were used to challenge the reliability of some “ancient manuscripts.” In the end, Alexander proved to be a traditional Protestant scholar who seriously resisted certain new discoveries and who considered new findings about “disputed texts” to be trivial, and who regularly quoted the church fathers when arguing against critical interpretations and challenges to the integrity of some biblical texts.⁷⁴

Alexander used a broad range of sources to support his positions. He kindled interest in the work of the patristic scholar William Cave (1637–1713),

⁶⁸ Moore-Jumonville, *The Hermeneutics of Historical Distance*, 2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Clark, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 102.

⁷¹ Taylor, *The Old Testament*, 13.

⁷² Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 66.

⁷³ *Ibid.* Cf. Michael Ledger-Lomas, “Conder and Sons: Dissent and the Oriental Bible in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” in *Dissent and the Bible in Britain, c. 1650–1950*, ed. Scott Mandelbrote and Michael Ledger-Lomas (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 210.

⁷⁴ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 66–67.

especially his *Historia literaria*. Alexander praised “the comparative excellence of the editions of the Fathers” and approved Cave’s dictum “that the older editions are, by so much the more faithful.”⁷⁵ To Alexander, the early church fathers had sufficiently settled most questions about the canon in terms of authenticity and integrity⁷⁶—two topics that he felt were paramount in light of the new scholarship he encountered. In addition to the ancient church fathers, he found other sources of evidence for verification. For example, with the help of the inductive method associated with Baconianism, Alexander attempted to verify certain truths by collecting biblical “facts” from Scripture, especially facts that were miraculous in character. He appealed to George Campbell’s argument in *A Dissertation on Miracles* (1762) in his defense of miracles against David Hume.⁷⁷ Instead of giving up the supernatural nature of Scripture, Alexander turned to prophecies and their fulfillment to verify biblical texts. Alexander also found evidence in the character of the Christian religion, which he described as “extraordinary and superlatively excellent.” When rejecting a critical description of the apostles, Alexander declared that Christianity “could not have been the production of imposters, nor of unassisted fishermen; nor indeed, of any description of uninspired men.”⁷⁸ In his defense of inspiration, Alexander argued that even the Bible had accommodated “human circumstances” when depicting imprints “of divinity in its face,”⁷⁹ thereby affirming both the human and the divine elements in the production of the Bible that were often identified as “concurus”—a concept that was essential to the later doctrine of inspiration that emerged from Princeton Seminary.⁸⁰

III. *Alexander’s Response to Modern Interpretations*

Alexander discouraged rational theology in his attempts to maintain a connection between biblical studies and dogmatic theology. He defended the early church’s assertion that the Bible consisted of inspired texts expressing

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Clark made this observation about Henry B. Smith, indicating that in general, traditional antebellum American Protestant scholars appealed to the church fathers in defense of the biblical canon. Clark, *Founding the Fathers*, 118.

⁷⁷ For a helpful study of George Campbell, see Jeffrey M. Suderman, *Orthodoxy and Enlightenment: George Campbell in the Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

⁷⁸ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 71.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ In his essay “The Divine and Human in the Bible,” Warfield discussed in detail the topic of concurus that he related to the concept of inspiration. Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Divine and Human in the Bible,” *Presbyterian Journal* 19.18 (May 3, 1894): 280.

God's revelation and should therefore always be acknowledged as regulative for faith and practice. In the spirit of traditional Christian scholarship, Alexander agreed with a description of the Bible as "the hermeneutical *regula fidei*."⁸¹ In hindsight, Enlightenment scholars challenged and misused in many ways the rule of faith.⁸² Alexander had particular disdain for the combination of faith and philosophy that some modern interpreters of his time espoused, especially the ways that some of them discarded Christian doctrines. Alexander noted that such rationalistic thinkers found specific references in the Bible to key doctrines such as the Trinity, original sin, or vicarious suffering, but rejected them as "contrary to reason."⁸³ Though he is known for using common sense realism in his defense of Christian religion, he disagreed with both neologist and Socinian attempts to use reason to establish Christian doctrines. He set strict boundaries regarding his willingness to study the Bible according to the rationalistic assumptions of the neologists.

In light of Alexander's response to rationalistic assumptions, one cannot overstate the importance of Alexander's biblical hermeneutic, with its insistence on Scripture as the guiding principle for doctrinal formulation. In this regard he stood in agreement with the traditions of Reformation and Reformed orthodoxy. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, hermeneutical models of exegesis and dogma were closely linked, with dogmatic works produced in support of biblical interpretation.⁸⁴ Protestant systems of theology were shaped by the exegetical undertaking of biblical texts. Common to Protestant dogmatics was the notion that the single rule of dogma is the Bible.⁸⁵ In line with post-Reformation dogmatics, the Bible served for Alexander as the source of theology. He believed that biblical revelation should be viewed as a guidebook for the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, Christology, and eschatology. For Alexander, the entire Bible "may be considered as a history of Redemption."⁸⁶

⁸¹ Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 95, 103, 110. On the concept and application of "regula fidei," see especially Bengt Hägglund, "Die Bedeutung der 'regula fidei' als Grundlage theologischer Aussagen," *Studia theologica* 12 (1958): 1–44.

⁸² John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and "Early Enlightenment" Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸³ Alexander, "An Inaugural Discourse," 75.

⁸⁴ Ferenc Szücs, "Reformed Dogmatics as a Hermeneutical Circle Between Exegesis and Preaching," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Petr Pokorný and Jan Roskovec (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 350.

⁸⁵ Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 52–53.

⁸⁶ Alexander, "An Inaugural Discourse," 97–98.

In addition to his interactions with rationalist hermeneutics, Alexander engaged with those scholars whose hermeneutics supported a natural theology associated with the High Church Anglican promotion of a scripture-based “natural philosophy.”⁸⁷ While the “Hutchinsonian circle” (named after John Hutchinson) opposed “anti-rationalist” and “anti-Socinian teachings” and emphasized the essence of the Trinity, they merged “natural philosophy and theology.”⁸⁸ Alexander opposed not only their natural philosophy, but also their approach, which analyzed the Trinity in light of “the natural world.” When discussing Hutchinson’s work, Alexander wrote that “the high mystery of the Trinity is supposed to be exhibited by the material fluid, which pervades the universe.”⁸⁹ Alexander apparently was a gentler critic of the Hutchinsonian circle than of the rationalists, in the end he nonetheless concluded that their premise was “too deeply enveloped in clouds and darkness.”⁹⁰

During Alexander’s lifetime, publishing houses were printing and selling texts by the Swedish scientist and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772),⁹¹ and like some other American intellectuals, Alexander was interested in analyzing mystical Bible interpretations linked to Swedenborg, who believed that all sentences in the Bible were related to specific “spiritual” principles, like all things in “the natural world,” and contained concealed “religious meaning.”⁹² Although Alexander was willing to discuss various aspects of spiritual and mystical interpretations, he expressed disapproval about their guiding principles, noting that “as there is no certain key to this mystical or spiritual meaning, every man makes it out according to the liveliness of his own imagination.”⁹³ He also faulted them for promoting mystical interpretations of the “*celestial, spiritual, and natural*” in Scripture.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Richard G. Olson, *Science and Religion, 1450–1900: From Copernicus to Darwin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 131.

⁸⁸ Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation, and Reform, 1660–1828: Archbishops of Canterbury and Their Diocese* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 58.

⁸⁹ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 77.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Summary Exposition of the Internal Sense of the Prophetic Books of the Word of the Old Testament: And Also of the Psalms of David. With a Two-Fold Index* (London: T. Plummer, Seething-Lane, under the inspection of R. Hindmarsh, Printer to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, 1800); Emanuel Swedenborg, *A Treatise Concerning Heaven and Hell: And of the Wonderful Things Therein, As Heard and Seen, by the Honourable and Learned Emanuel Swedenborg*, Translated from the Original Latin (Chester: C. W. Leadbeater, 1800).

⁹² Marilyn Masler and Marina Pacini, *Carl Gutherz: Poetic Vision and Academic Ideals* (Memphis: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 71.

⁹³ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 78.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

As he stated in his initial lecture, Alexander sought to answer the core question of “how ... the Scriptures [should] be interpreted, in order ... [to] arrive at their true and full meaning.”⁹⁵ While he sometimes considered “grammatical” issues and “literal” interpretations of the Bible, he repeatedly speculated about whether literal readings of biblical text should be considered as containing final meanings. In this regard, Alexander believed that biblical exegetes should follow “a middle course” between Johannes Cocceius and Hugo Grotius with the help of “sound sense and just criticism.”⁹⁶ He cited the popular axiom of his day “that Grotius could find Christ nowhere in the Bible, Cocceius everywhere”⁹⁷—an axiom he adopted from a work written by the eighteenth-century church historian Johannes Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern*, which was used as a core textbook at Princeton Seminary.⁹⁸ In it, Mosheim wrote that Cocceius alleged “that the whole New Testament history exhibited a kind of mirror of Christ ... and that the predictions of the ancient prophets in their literal import treated of Jesus Christ.”⁹⁹ While far removed from Cocceius’s excessive view, Alexander diverged even further from some of his American peers, who condensed “the contents of levitical typology to a minimum.”¹⁰⁰ Even as Alexander acknowledged that Cocceius’s principle was vastly misused, he agreed with some aspects of Cocceius’s hermeneutical rule and perceived some of his followers (among them Herman Witsius, Campegius Vitringa, and Salomon van Til) as leading biblical expositors. But in the end Alexander seized the occasion to express his basic rule of interpretation,

That every particular passage of scripture should be interpreted according to the peculiar circumstances of the case: the literal should be considered as the true and only meaning, unless some remoter sense be indicated by some peculiar aptitude, correspondence, or fitness, in the words and ideas of the text; or unless it be referred to something else in the Scriptures themselves.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 78, 81.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁹⁸ Johann Lorenz Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern: From the Birth of Christ, to the Beginning of the Present Century: in which the Rise, Progress, and Variations of Church Power, Are Considered in Their Connection with the State of Learning and Philosophy, and the Political History of Europe during That Period*, trans. Archibald Maclaine, D.D., vol. 5 (Charlestown: Samuel Etheridge, 1811).

⁹⁹ Ibid., 5:345.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 328.

¹⁰¹ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 81.

In short, Alexander was convinced that both common sense and “the analogy of faith” served as useful guides for a balanced biblical interpretation.

IV. Tools of Biblical Interpretation

Alexander was especially enthusiastic about introducing practical tools for biblical interpretation to his students. Without advocating the historical-critical method, Alexander nonetheless felt that biblical scholars must be familiar with ancient Jewish history and customs. Like Semler and Michaelis, he felt that he could not disregard Jewish culture and history when attempting to comprehend the “Hebrew Scriptures.”¹⁰² For this reason, Alexander taught a course on Jewish antiquities, defined as “an account of the religious institutions and ceremonies of the Jews: their manners and customs, their houses, dress, food, marriages, funerals, agriculture ... in short everything relating to peculiar people in ancient and modern times which can in any measure illustrate the holy scriptures.”¹⁰³ In the course, Alexander appealed to various sources such as Josephus, Philo, the authors of the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, and ancient secular authors, as well as the Talmud and Rabbinical writings. Alexander believed that the Bible must be studied in its historical context in the same manner as other works of literature.¹⁰⁴ Yet he was particularly concerned about sharing the work of historians working on ancient Jewish and Roman periods, believing that such knowledge would help biblical students not only to understand the background of the text they were studying, but also to understand the fulfillment of prophecies recorded by ancient historians. In addition, Alexander was clearly fascinated by chronology and geography, which he felt would help him understand specific sections of the Bible. Although Alexander emphasized the importance of historical and geographical studies, unlike Semler and Michaelis, he did not consider the Bible as a mere “historical document” to be analyzed by “secular means.”¹⁰⁵

Given the Enlightenment culture of the time, it is not surprising that Alexander was willing to apply scientific knowledge to biblical hermeneutics.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Archibald Alexander, “Compend of Lectures: Biblical and Jewish Antiquities & Oriental Customs,” (Princeton, n.d.), Manuscript 21.16, The Archibald Alexander Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Library. Turner, *Philology*, 113.

¹⁰³ Alexander, “Compend of Lectures.”

¹⁰⁴ According to Alexander, “Many passages would be quite unintelligible, without some acquaintance with Jewish antiquities. The customs and manners of that people should, therefore, be studied with particular attention.” Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 83.

¹⁰⁵ Turner, *Philology*, 114.

¹⁰⁶ For a study on the application of science, see John Gascoigne, *Joseph Banks and the*

The faculty members at Old Princeton were very much in tune with links between science and religion. According to Alexander, “there is scarcely any science or branch of knowledge, which may not be made subservient to theology”¹⁰⁷—a view that Alexander shared with many of his Princeton colleagues. He claimed that natural history, chemistry, and geology could provide essential support for interpreting complex biblical passages, and therefore suggested that theologians should become familiar with “the whole circle of science.”¹⁰⁸ One of his students, Charles Hodge, adopted his mentor’s views when ardently describing analogies between science and theology in his *Systematic Theology*.¹⁰⁹

But Alexander did much more than simply stress historical and scientific sensibility in biblical interpretation—he challenged rationalist theologians and critical scholars to consider a doctrine of “illumination and assistance of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁰ Even in his opposition to skepticism, Alexander emphasized the trustworthiness of human rational capacities, although he resisted applying them to “special revelation.”¹¹¹ Guided by a Calvinistic anthropology, Alexander mistrusted reason in the realm of special revelation because of what he described as “the weakness of the human intellect” and therefore believed that biblical exegetes “must be convinced, that without divine assistance, there is little hope of arriving at the knowledge of truth.”¹¹² The underlying assumption of Alexander’s approach was that students of the Bible should be pious and regenerated, a view cultivated by the traditions of Pietism and Puritanism that were popular at Princeton. It is worth mentioning in this regard that Alexander described the English Puritan John Flavel (1630–1691) as the author who had most influenced him, and he borrowed from Flavel’s ideas to build a case about the importance of the inward illumination of the Spirit.¹¹³ Alexander believed that with the help of the Holy Spirit the biblical “text is opened and illustrated.”¹¹⁴ This is another example of Alexander prioritizing the concept of illumination regarding

English Enlightenment: Useful Knowledge and Polite Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁷ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 84.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ For a fuller treatment, see Annette G. Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 177. Cf. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1872), 1:573.

¹¹⁰ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 90.

¹¹¹ William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 294.

¹¹² Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 91, 95.

¹¹³ Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 42, 46.

¹¹⁴ Alexander, “An Inaugural Discourse,” 93.

biblical interpretation.¹¹⁵ As it had been for the Protestant Reformers, the topic of the Spirit's internal testimony was very important to Alexander and other Princeton professors in terms of biblical interpretation, and deserves additional evaluation by modern scholars.

Conclusion

Alexander was one of the first professors at Princeton Seminary to interact with the Enlightenment Bible and the neological hermeneutics associated with German biblical criticism. However, his work in these areas is still overshadowed by the modern historical emphases on Edward Everett and George Ticknor, who began their studies in Germany in 1815.¹¹⁶ Although he did not spend time at a German university, Alexander was willing to engage with and respond to German critical scholarship and to defend traditional beliefs. His willingness resulted in various lectures on biblical studies and the publication of a book on the biblical canon, *The Canon of the Old and New Testament*, which was well received on both sides of the Atlantic. In North America, this volume was the first textbook to deal exclusively with the biblical canon.¹¹⁷

While expressing respect and praise for German critical scholarship, Alexander energetically addressed what he viewed as its shortcomings, and he went out of his way to introduce his students and anyone else interested in theology to what he believed were the proper elements of biblical scholarship and canonical criteria. As part of his own approach he employed the notion of illumination, the inductive method, cultural studies, and grammatical and philological tools to analyze biblical texts as well as historical apologetics in the defense of the canon. Alexander, alongside some other American nineteenth-century biblical scholars, believed that some scientific biblical criticism generated interpretations that were unacceptable to traditional principles.¹¹⁸ While he appreciated new historical findings and

¹¹⁵ He never modified this view; nearly three decades later he wrote: "I hold that no unregenerate man is, while in that state, any more capable of spiritual perception than a blind man is of a perception of colours." Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1841), 83.

¹¹⁶ Lydia Willisky-Ciullo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma: The Conundrum of Biblical Authority* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 107.

¹¹⁷ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), xxi. For a solid account regarding the question of canonicity in early North America, see David F. Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 122.

¹¹⁸ Herbst, *The German Historical School in America*, 82. Herbst's interpretation of Moses Stuart applies as well to Alexander.

expressed a desire to use science for hermeneutics, he resisted a Kantian framework and neological approach. Still, in light of his view that it was important for American students to be familiar with German biblical studies and criticism,¹¹⁹ he was willing to address the ideas of leading neologists such as Michaelis, and encouraged one of his best students, Charles Hodge, to study at Halle and Berlin Universities.

¹¹⁹ Archibald Alexander, "Survey of Modern German Works on Interpretation," *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 5.1 (1833): 9–19.